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ABSTRACT

This research examined teacher evaluation of performance of black and white third graders of middle and lower socioeconomic status when adequacy of performance was equivalent for all groups, although the students' speech patterns varied as a function of their race and social class. Teachers rated and ranked taped picture descriptions that were equivalent in features described but that were different in speech patterns used to describe them. A Friedman ANOVA yielded significant differences in both rating and ranking scores assigned to the four groups. The results indicated that the differences occurred between both the social class and the racial groups. Middle-SES children were rated and ranked more positively than lower-SES children, and white children were rated and ranked more positively than black children. (Author/MB)

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# Teacher Judgments of the Communication Effectiveness of Children Using Different Speech Patterns

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Abstract

Research investigating teacher judgments of children whose speech patterns differ has confounded adequacy of performance and speech patterns. This study investigated teacher judgments of functionally equivalent speech samples obtained from middle- and lower-SES black and white children. Teachers rated and ranked taped picture descriptions which were equivalent on features described but were different in speech patterns used to describe them. A Friedman ANOVA yielded significant differences in both rating and ranking scores assigned to the four groups. Post hoc analyses indicated that the differences occurred between both the social class and the racial groups. Middle-SES children were rated and ranked more positively than lower-SES children, and white children were rated and ranked more positively than black children.

# Teacher Judgments of the Communication Effectiveness of Children Using Different Speech Patterns

Although children who speak nonstandard dialects may not experience an inability to comprehend standard English (Hall & Turner, 1974; Quay, 1975), their nonstandard speech may indirectly hinder their academic success. That is, nonstandard speech may negatively influence teacher evaluations of speaker abilities, resulting in differential treatment of the nonstandard speaking child. A first step in ascertaining whether this situation occurs is the examination of teacher evaluations of the performance of children whose speech patterns differ from middle-class speech patterns, when such performance is known to be equivalent for all speakers.

Previous research findings have tended to indicate that teachers consider the speakers of nonstandard dialects to be less adequate in their speech than speakers of standard English (Naremore, R., 1971; Whitehead, J. L., and Miller, L., 1972; Williams, F., Whitehead, J. L., and Miller, L., 1971). However, because this research has consistently used taped speech samples obtained in semi-formal interviews, adequacy of performance and speech patterns have been confounded. For example, when two children are asked to describe what they do when they leave school, the answers may vary as a function of syntax, phonology, lexical items, content, amount of time given in answering, the number of false starts and pauses, and verbosity. When teachers are then asked to make a comparative evaluation of the two answers, it is impossible to identify the critical determiners of the teachers' judgments. Thus, whether judgments are affected by a nonstandard dialect *per se* or by other speech characteristics which may indeed relate to the adequacy of the description has not been ascertained. The purpose of the present research was to examine teacher evaluations of

performance of middle- and lower-SES black and white children when adequacy of performance was equivalent for all groups although their speech patterns varied as a function of their race and social class.

## Method

Speech samples were obtained from 12 third-grade children, three from each of the following groups: lower-SES black, middle-SES black, lower-SES white, and middle-SES white. Socioeconomic status was ascertained by the Hollingshead-Redlich Occupational Scale. Lower-SES children were selected from the lowest two classifications and middle-SES children from the highest three classifications. Because preliminary work had indicated that listeners could not identify the sex of the third-grade children beyond the chance level, sex of speaker was not controlled.

To obtain the speech samples, three sets of pictures from the Picture Identification Task developed by Baldwin, McFarlane, and Garvey (1971) were used. Each set consisted of an array of seven non-culturally related figures on a single page. One of the pictures, the target picture, contained four critical attributes. The other six pictures differed from the stimulus picture on one, two, or three of these attributes. For example, one page of pictures consisted of caterpillar-like creatures. All caterpillars on the page varied on one or more of the following attributes: red or black dots, circles or no circles on antennae, six or eight legs, and one or two eyes. However, only one caterpillar, the target picture, had a particular combination of these attributes. Each child was instructed to describe particular attributes of the stimulus picture. Some children described two attributes, others described three attributes, and others described four attributes. After practice trials to assure that each child

described those attributes, and only those attributes, which he was instructed to describe, a final description was tape recorded. Sets of descriptions were then made up and professionally recorded in the following way. For each picture, four taped descriptions were obtained, one from a child from each of the four social-class and racial groups. These descriptions were then matched for length, number of critical target picture attributes, and number of disfluencies (false starts, pauses). Three sets of descriptions (one set for each picture) were made, with order of speakers within a set randomized. Thus, adequacy of task performance was controlled; only the speech patterns varied.

To examine the effects of the different speech patterns on teacher's evaluations of the adequacy of the descriptions, the stimulus materials were presented to 56 preschool and primary-grade teachers, 9 black and 47 white, who were enrolled in a beginning graduate course in early childhood education. The three sets of tapes, each containing the four descriptions of the target picture in the array, were played. At the same time, the array of pictures, with the target picture designated by being enclosed in a square, was shown by means of an overhead projector. The teachers were told that the speakers on the tape were describing the target picture so that a cohort could select it from the array. For each of the three sets of picture descriptions, the teachers were instructed to listen first to all four speakers without rating them and then to listen a second time and, while listening to each speaker, to rate him on a five-point Likert Scale from very poor to very good on how well he had performed the task of describing the target picture. After the ratings for each set

were finished, the teachers were instructed to rank order the four speakers in the set from best to worst, with the criterion again being how well the speaker performed the task.

Results

Rating and ranking scores were analyzed separately. Four rating scores were obtained for each teacher. Each rating score represented the total of the three ratings (one rating for each picture described) which the teacher assigned to the three children in a particular social-class/racial group. Therefore, each teacher was assigned a score for lower-SES black speakers, lower-SES white speakers, middle-SES black speakers, and middle-SES white speakers. The possible range of rating scores which a teacher could obtain for each social group of speakers was 3 to 15. Total ranking scores were obtained in the same manner, the possible range being 3 to 12 for each group of speakers.

Both the rating scores and the ranking scores were analyzed by means of a Friedman ANOVA ( see Sigel, 1956 ). Significant differences were obtained between groups for both the ratings, $\underline{X}^2(3)=93.10$, $p < .05$, and the rankings, $\underline{X}^2(3)=35.47$, $p < .05$. Post hoc comparisons of the ratings by means of the Rosenthal and Ferguson test (Rosenthal and Ferguson, 1965) indicated that the black speakers as a group were rated lower than white speakers and that black and white lower-SES speakers were rated lower than black and white middle-SES speakers. Black and white lower-SES speakers were not rated significantly differently from each other. However, the middle-SES black speakers were rated lower than the middle-SES white speakers. The ranking data yielded similar results. A post hoc analysis of ranking scores using the Rosenthal and Ferguson test revealed black speakers as a

group were ranked lower than the white speakers, and lower-SES speakers as a group were rated lower than middle-SES speakers. Again, the rankings of the black and white lower-SES speakers did not differ significantly, and the black middle-SES speakers were ranked significantly lower than the white middle-SES speakers.

Discussion

The results indicated that when the speech productions of black and white middle- and lower-SES children were carefully controlled for content, fluency, and functional adequacy, teachers' ratings and rankings of the speakers showed a distinct social class and racial bias. The class bias appeared strongest. However, in the case of middle-SES speakers, race was also a factor as illustrated by the significant difference on both measures between the middle-SES black and white speakers. The findings suggest that the teachers were attending less to what a child said than to how he said it. This finding is consistent with a finding of Naremore (1971) which suggested that ratings by white graduate students of black speakers were affected more by the standardness than the fluency of the speech. It also supports the finding by Williams, Whitehead, and Miller (1971) that when speech was uniformly standard English (through dubbing), a "stereotype" effect was obtained in that Mexican American and black children were rated as more ethnic-nonstandard than white children.

The findings indicated that teachers were not objective in their evaluations of children's performance but were strongly influenced by the speech patterns of the children. The fact that teacher evaluations were negatively influenced by lower-class white, as well as lower-class black, speech patterns suggests that their attitudes are influenced not only by

black dialect features but also by more general speech differences. These findings have implications for teacher education in that they strongly indicate that teachers should be trained to develop an understanding of the fact that their attitudes toward a child's speech may hamper their ability to evaluate the child objectively. Procedures should be included in teacher training programs for training the teacher to look beyond a child's speech patterns in evaluating his ability and/or performance.

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